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What is a **Contradiction?**

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Dealing Fairly with Alleged Bible Contradictions

[Part II]

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Part I of this two-part series appeared in the October issue. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended.]

#4—Understanding the Real Nature of a Contradiction

IT might surprise some to learn that, although skeptics are widely known for their frequent use of the term “contradiction” in their insistence that the Bible writers made mistakes, Christian apologists are more than happy to discuss “contradictions,” and specifically, what a contradiction actually is. As with any meaningful discussion, we cannot have rational dialogue about “contradictions” unless the term first is defined and understood.

The Law of Contradiction is one of the most fundamental principles of logic. In fact, the great fourth century B.C. Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote in his renowned philosophical work, *Metaphysics*, that this principle is “the most certain principle of all” (4:3). It is a principle “which every one must have who understands anything that is... and that which every one must know who knows anything” (4:3). What is the Law of Contradiction? It is, as Aristotle noted, “that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect” (4:3). In other words, if the same thing is said to be and not be (1) for the same person, place, or thing, (2) at the same time, and (3)

in the same sense (or respect), then a genuine contradiction exists. For example, it is impossible for the same glass of water to be completely empty and completely full at the same time and in the same sense. However, if one of the three aforementioned variables is untrue or is unknown, a person cannot logically contend that a contradiction exists. Can we be sure that we are talking about the same glass of water at the same time and in the same sense? If so, then there is a contradiction. If not, then no contradiction exists. If the variables are unknown, then it cannot be proven that a contradiction exists, and principle #1 (discussed in Part I of this article) applies: The Bible writers are innocent until proven guilty.

Consider the Law of Contradiction in light of two different statements: (1) “Ricky Smith is rich,” and (2) “Ricky Smith is poor.” Do these statements contradict each other? Many would be tempted immediately to say, “Of course.” However, without knowing for certain that the statements are made **about the same person**, we cannot reasonably claim that they contradict each other. It could be that the first statement is made about a rich Ricky Smith in Oklahoma, while the second statement is about a different, poor Ricky Smith who lives in New York. When comparing two statements, we must make sure that the same person, place, or thing is under consideration.

But what if we are talking about the same Ricky Smith? Would the statements “Ricky Smith is rich” and “Ricky Smith is poor” then be contradictory? Not necessarily. It may be that two different periods of time are under discussion. Ricky Smith could have been extremely poor as a child and could have continued to struggle in poverty into his early 20s. However, after working his way up in a large company over a period of 20 years, Ricky Smith could have become very wealthy by the time he was 40. Thus, if the two statements about Ricky refer to **two different times in his life**, they certainly are not contradictory.

What's more, it is very possible that the same Ricky Smith could be rich and poor, even at the same time, if the terms “rich” and “poor” are used **in different senses**. Ricky Smith could be a billionaire, but if he is not a Christian, he is spiritually poor. On the other hand, Ricky Smith could be materially poor, yet be “in Christ” with “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3) and thus be spiritually rich. (“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith”—James 2:5?) Unless the terms are used in the same sense, then Ricky Smith could certainly be “rich” **and** “poor” at the same time.

When the term “contradiction” is clearly defined and understood, then both Bible students and skeptics will quickly see that so-called “contradictions” are merely legitimate differences that do not demand a contradiction. Different people, places, and things may be discussed. Different times may be under consideration. Or, words and statements may be used in different senses. Consider these three principles in light of various alleged problems in Scripture.

#5—Is the Same Person, Place, or Thing Being Considered?

Acts 12:2 vs. Acts 15:13

According to Acts 12:1-2, “Herod the king stretched out his hand to

harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” Only three chapters later, however, Luke recorded that James was alive and well at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13ff.)—an event that took place well after the death of James. How could both Acts 12 and Acts 15 be correct? How could James be dead and alive at the same time? The simple (and hopefully obvious) explanation is that Acts 12:2 and Acts 15:13 are referring to two different men—both of whom were named James. The James who lost his life at the hands of King Herod was the apostle, the brother of John (Acts 12:2), the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21). The James of Acts 15 was the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19; Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17). The name James appears 42 times in the New Testament, referring to four different men—the two mentioned above as well as James the son of Alphaeus (Luke 6:15) and James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). As with any person in Scripture, careful attention must be given to whom a particular writing refers.

Matthew 23:35 vs. 2 Chronicles 24:20

The example of James in the book of Acts is rather elementary. At other times in Scripture, the reference to a particular person may be less certain, and more likely to be criticized. For example, in Matthew 23:35, Jesus referred to the Jews murdering “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah...between the temple and the altar.” Skeptics have argued that this Zechariah “is actually the son of Jehoiada as is shown by 2 Chron. 24:20.... The name Barachias or Barachiah is not in the Old Testament” (McKinsey, 2000, p. 30; cf. Morgan, 2003). The fact is, however, it cannot be proven that Jesus was referring to “Zechariah the son of Jehoiada” (2 Chronicles 24:20) in his reprimand of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:35. A reasonable case can be made that Jesus was referring to one of at least three different people.

First, it may be that Jesus was referring to Zechariah the minor prophet, who preached during the days of Ezra (Ezra 5:1), some 400 years after Zechariah, son of Jehoiada. In fact, contrary to Dennis McKinsey’s comment that “the name Barachias or Barachiah is not in the Old Testament” (p. 30), Zechariah, the minor prophet, actually is called “the son of **Berechiah** (spelled Barachias in the Septuagint—EL), the son of Iddo” (Zechariah 1:1; cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Although the Old Testament writers did not record his death, Jesus, the Son of God, would have known how he died, and it also could have been known through Jewish tradition. [NOTE: One must keep in mind that the Old Testament is not the only source for New Testament data concerning what took place from Creation until the coming of Christ. The New Testament writers were inspired by God (cf. 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:37; John 16:13). How did Paul know that “**Jannes and Jambres** resisted Moses” (2 Timothy 3:8, emp. added) when the names of Pharaoh’s magicians are not given in the Old Testament? How did Jude know that Michael the archangel and the devil “disputed about the body of Moses” (Jude 9) when no Old Testament writer mentioned such an event? Paul

and Jude either knew of these facts from tradition and recorded them by inspiration, or God miraculously revealed this information to them. Similarly, in Matthew 23:35 Jesus could have simply been referring to the death of one of the last Old Testament prophets, which was not recorded in the Old Testament, but known by God and perhaps Jewish tradition.]

Second, though many **assume** that Jesus was referring to a martyr named Zechariah from Old Testament times, a closer look at Jesus’ comments may reveal otherwise. He rebuked the Pharisees, saying:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.” Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them **you will kill and crucify**, and some of them **you will scourge** in your

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synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, **whom you murdered** between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (Matthew 23:29-36, emp. added).

Notice that Jesus spoke to His first century enemies, saying, “**you** murdered” Zechariah, son of Berechiah (Matthew 23:35, emp. added). A straightforward reading of this passage, without assuming that Zechariah was one of the more than two dozen persons who wore the name Zechariah in the Old Testament, may mean that **the Pharisees themselves** had murdered a righteous man named Zechariah around A.D. 30. Perhaps, as Burton Coffman concluded,

Christ here referred to some secret murder perpetrated, not by the ancestors of those men, but **by them**.... Christ tried with that one last lightning stroke of truth to get through to them, but even that failed. That no such murder was recorded in either the Old Testament or the New Testament, and that there was no general knowledge of it in the days of Christ, and that no traditions were developed with reference to it—these things present no difficulty at all, but point squarely at the Pharisees and show their effectiveness in covering up their evil deeds and hiding them from popular view.... It is further evidence of their depravity that none of them ever confessed it, even after he who knew their thoughts revealed it publicly! Their guilty secret went to the grave with them, except for this ray of light from the lips of Christ who made it known on the occasion of their being sentenced to hell for their wickedness (1974, p. 375, emp. in orig.).

Third, considering the fact that God’s spokesmen occasionally spoke of things yet to come as if they had already occurred (commonly known as “prophetic perfect”; cf. Isaiah 53; 21:1-10), it may be (however unlikely) that Jesus

was speaking about the death of a future Zechariah. According to Josephus, about 35 years following Jesus’ death, two zealots slew Zacharias the son of Baruch in the middle of the temple simply for being rich, hating wickedness, and loving liberty (1987, 4:5:4).

Whatever the answer to the question, “To which Zechariah was Jesus referring?,” one thing is beyond any doubt: skeptics do not have a shred of evidence that Matthew 23:35 is an uninspired, errant passage. It truly may be that Jesus was referring to an entirely different Zechariah than the one mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24:20. And, as the Law of Contradiction demonstrates, unless it can be proven that the same person is under consideration in two separate statements, it is unfair and unreasonable to assert that a contradiction exists.

#6—Is the Same Period of Time Under Consideration?

Genesis 1:31 vs. Genesis 6:6

At evilbible.com, a Web site that purports to “spread the vicious truth about the Bible” (“Biblical...,” 2013), the very first alleged “obvious contradiction” listed involves Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 6:6. Since Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good,” and Genesis 6:6 reveals that “the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart,” the Bible is said to be contradictory and untrustworthy. Allegedly, the Lord could not be both satisfied and dissatisfied with His Creation. The fact is, however, God could logically be both pleased and displeased with His Creation, **if the statements were referring to two different periods of time**. Most any Bible student knows that, though only four complete chapters separate Genesis 1:31 and 6:6, they are separated—chronologically speaking—by more than a millennium. “In the beginning” God was pleased with His Creation. Several hundred years later, after “the Lord saw that the wickedness

of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), God was **then** “sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (6:6). It is quite telling that such a simple explanation has apparently eluded the minds of many skeptics.

Matthew 27:5 vs. Acts 1:18

Through the years, the description of Judas Iscariot’s death has been one of the most popular alleged Bible contradictions cited by critics of biblical inerrancy. It seems as if every skeptical book or Web site that questions the integrity of the Bible lists Judas’ death as one of the most obvious inconsistencies in Scripture. Whereas Matthew recorded that Judas “went and hanged himself” after betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (27:5), Luke recorded that “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (Acts 1:18). Because Matthew only mentioned Judas being hanged, while Luke mentioned Judas falling headlong and bursting open at his midsection, a “real” contradiction supposedly is evident.

The differences in these two accounts are easily (and rationally) explained when we consider that Matthew and Luke were referring to **two different times**. Matthew recorded the **initial** hanging of Judas, while Luke recorded what took place some time **later** (probably several days later). Soon after Judas took his life, his body would have begun the decomposing process. If a dead body is left to itself (with no attempt to preserve it, e.g., embalming), bacteria soon begin to break down various bodily tissues. As a result, gases are released within the body, which in turn cause it to swell. A few years ago, a news outlet reported how a large sperm whale had beached itself on the shores of Taiwan and died. While on its way to being transported through a Taiwanese city to a particular research center, the swollen, unpunctured mammal literally exploded

and soaked pedestrians and motorists in blood and entrails. According to one Taiwanese scientist, “Because of the natural decomposing process, a lot of gases accumulated, and when the pressure build-up was too great, the whale’s belly exploded” (“Whale Explodes...,” 2004). In light of such decomposition, it certainly is not difficult to imagine that Judas’ decaying body, which may have been swelling for a number of days, could have fallen a short distance (from wherever it was hanging), and easily burst open once striking the ground. As Wayne Jackson concluded about Judas in his excellent commentary on Acts: “The language necessitates no conflict. Either he hanged himself from a very high place—with perhaps the rope breaking; or else, no one removed his body for a while, it eventually fell under its own weight, and the decomposing corpse burst open” (2005, p. 13). Again, the reason that Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18 are not contradictory regarding Judas’ death is because they are not referring to the exact same time—at least the skeptic cannot prove that they are referring to the same time—and thus the charge of contradiction is unfounded and irresponsible.

#7—Are the Compared Words and Phrases Used in the Same Sense?

Matthew 27:5-7 vs. Acts 1:18

The description of Judas’ death is not the only problem that skeptics have with Acts 1:18. Since Matthew 27:5-7 indicates that the **chief priests** used the betrayal money that Judas threw on the temple floor to purchase the potter’s field, critics contend that a contradiction exists because Acts 1:18 reveals that **Judas** purchased the field with the blood money. Obviously, Judas could not have purchased the field because he gave the 30 pieces of silver back to the priests before hanging himself. Thus, to say that Judas bought the potter’s field is allegedly contrary to the facts.

If one believes it is wrong to say that a father bought a car for his son, when in actuality the son purchased the car with the \$3,000 his father gave him, then Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5-7 may be considered contradictory. If one believes that it is deceitful to say an employer purchased a meal for his staff, when, in fact, it was one of the employees who handed the money to the waiter, then the events recorded in Acts 1:18 could be considered fictitious. But fair and reasonable people would not reach such conclusions as these, because most people recognize the truth of the well-known principle: “he who acts through another is deemed in law to do it himself” (“Agency,” 2010), which is based on the Latin maxim, “*Qui facit per alium, facit per se.*”

In Acts 1:18, the reader is not forced to conclude that Judas **personally** bought the potter’s field. Rather, as is seen throughout Scripture, Luke was simply indicating that Judas furnished the **means** of purchasing the field. (Remember, the burden of proof is upon the one alleging the contradiction that Luke could not have been using the term “purchase” in this sense, and such real proof has never been produced.) The Bible writers frequently represented a man as doing a thing when, in fact, he merely supplied the means for doing it. For example, Moses wrote how Joseph spoke of his brothers as selling him **into Egypt** (Genesis 45:4-5; cf. Acts 7:9), when actually they sold him to **the Ishmaelites**—who then sold him into Egypt. John mentioned that “the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John the Baptizer (**though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples**)” (John 4:1-3, emp. added). When the Bible says, “Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him” (John 19:1), most people understand that he would have simply **ordered** Jesus to be scourged, not that he actually did the scourging himself.

Whether one says that Judas “purchased a field with the wages of iniquity” (Acts

1:18), or that the chief priests “bought with them the potter’s field” (Matthew 27:7), he has stated the same truth, only in different ways.

Matthew 23:35 vs. 2 Chronicles 24:20

While considering the different respects in which inspired penmen used words and phrases, it is appropriate to revisit Matthew 23:35 and 2 Chronicles 24:20. Suppose that when Jesus mentioned “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah” (Matthew 23:35) that He **was** referring to the Zechariah (called “the son of Jehoiada”) of 2 Chronicles 24:20. Such a reference still would not necessarily be a contradiction for at least two reasons. First, it could very well be that Berechiah and Jehoiada were the same person, but wore different names. In ancient times, people frequently had more than one name. Moses’ father-in-law was known both as Reuel and Jethro (Exodus 2:18; 3:1). Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal after destroying an altar of Baal (Judges 6:32; 7:1; 8:29,35). In 2 Kings 15, King Jotham’s father is called both Azariah (vs. 7) and Uzziah (vs. 32). The names are different, but they refer to the same person (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:1-23; Isaiah 1:1). The apostle Peter is sometimes called Peter, Simon, Simon Peter, and Cephas (Matthew 14:28; 16:16; 17:25; John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12). People have worn multiple names for centuries. In modern times, most people could think of several individuals who are called by various names. (Although most of the time my oldest son answers to his middle name, “Bo,” sometimes we call him by his first name “Elijah.” At other times, we may summon him by his full name “Elijah Bo Lyons.”) Is it not possible that Jehoiada also was known as Berechiah? Certainly! One wonders why Bible critics are so certain that Jesus made a mistake when even they themselves are accustomed to calling others by a variety of names.

It may also be that Jehoiada was Zechariah’s grandfather and Berechiah was his father. The term “son” is used in

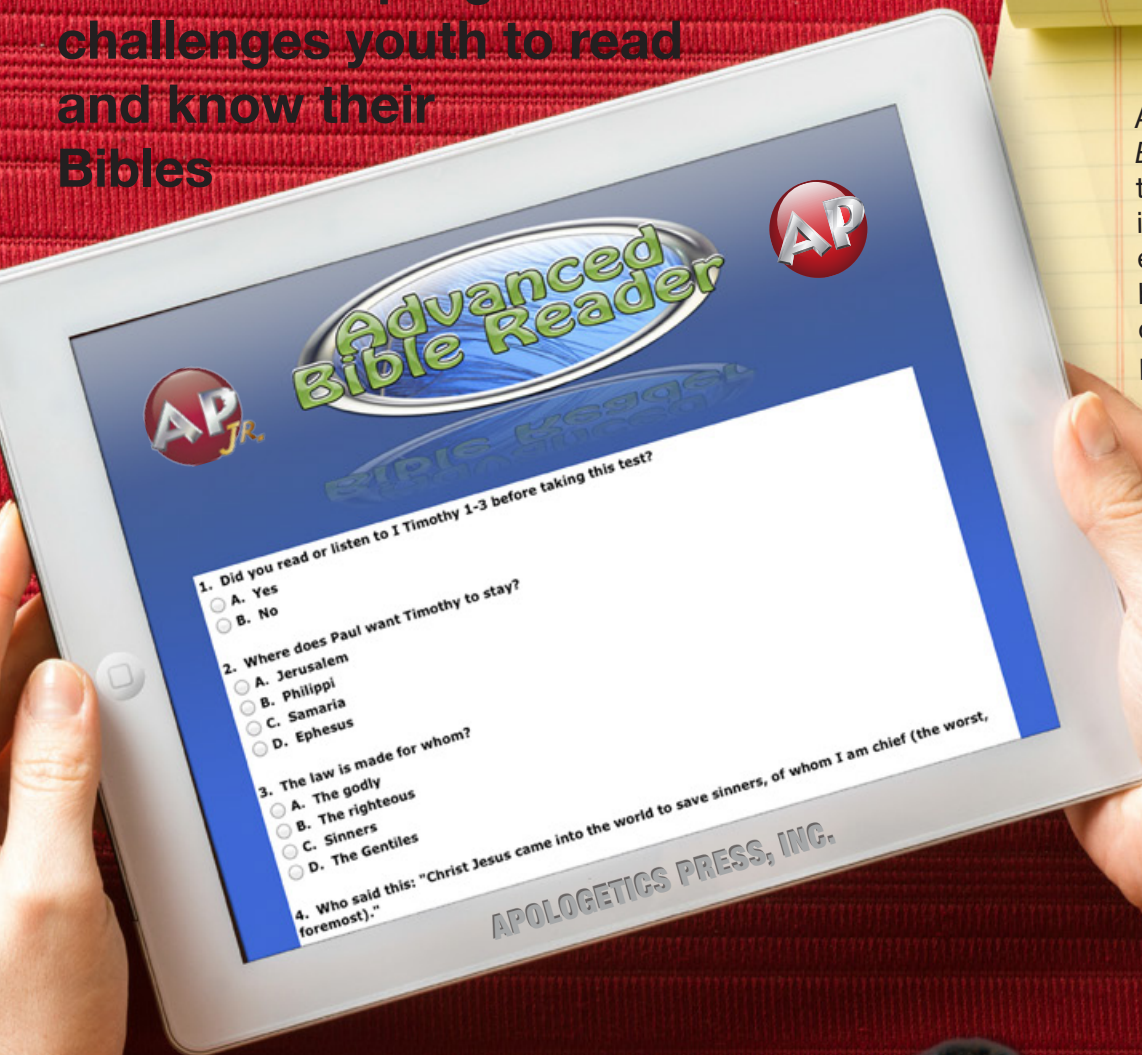
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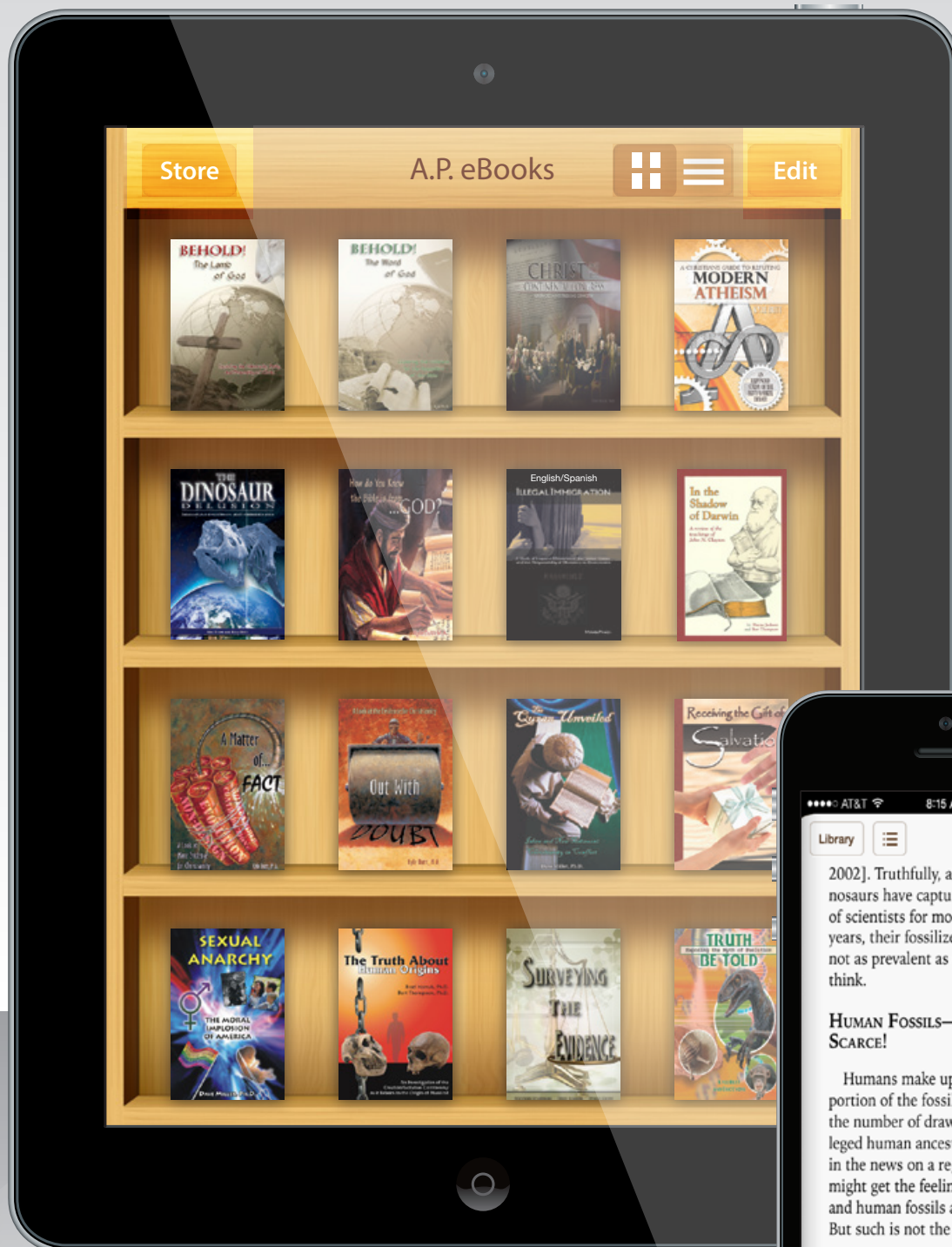
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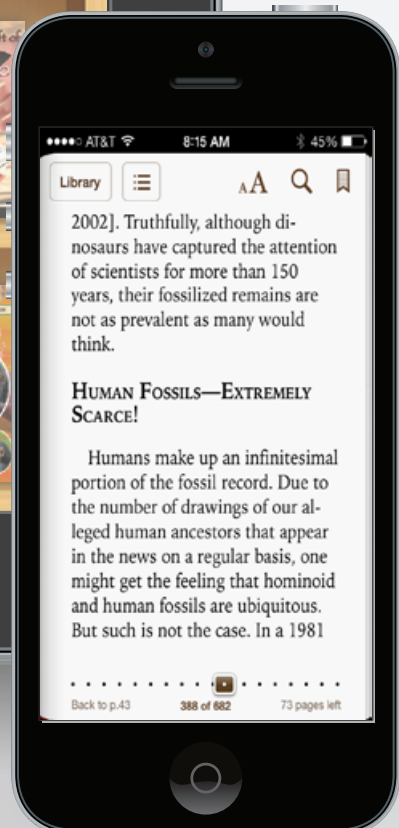


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several senses in Scripture. Aside from using it to signify a son by actual birth, Bible writers used it to mean (1) son-in-law (1 Samuel 24:16; cf. 18:27), (2) grandson (Genesis 29:5), (3) descendant (Matthew 1:1), (4) son by creation, as in the case of Adam (Luke 3:38), (5) son by education (i.e., disciple—1 Samuel 3:6), etc. After reading Genesis 29:5, one might think that Laban was the son of Nahor, but Genesis 24 explains that he actually was Nahor's grandson (24:24,29; cf. 22:20-24). Mephibosheth is called the "son of Saul" in 2 Samuel 19:24, when actually he was "the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul" (2 Samuel 9:6; 4:4). Mephibosheth was technically Saul's grandson, though Scripture refers to him once simply as the "son of Saul." These are only two examples where the Bible conveys to the reader that the term "son" was used to mean grandson. One can only wonder how many times the term "son" is used this way throughout Scripture, and yet, unlike the examples of Laban and Mephibosheth, were **not** explained to be grandchildren. Indeed, Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, may be just one such example. Concerning this possibility, commentator R.C.H. Lenski noted:

This is possible when we remember the great age of Jehoiada, 130 years, and when we recall his great deeds, making it highly creditable to be called his son. So in Chronicles Zachariah would be named after his illustrious grandfather but in Matthew after his father, the name of the father having been preserved by Jewish tradition or in genealogical records. The Jews also frequently called a man a son of a mighty grandsire, especially while the latter was still living (1961, p. 920).

The fact is, there are several legitimately possible explanations for why Jesus referred to Zechariah as "the son of Berechiah," and any one of these possibilities justifiably dispels the vacuous charge of contradiction. Simply because we may not know for certain the identity of the Zechariah Jesus

mentioned, does not mean we have the right to label Jesus and the Bible writers as uninspired. In truth, the only apparent contradiction regarding this matter lies, not in the Bible, but in Bible critic Dennis McKinsey's own accusation. On page 30 of his book *Biblical Errancy*, McKinsey insisted that the Zechariah of Matthew 23:35 "is actually the son of Jehoiada." However, later in the book, he wrote (immediately following a quotation of Matthew 23:35): "The Zecharias mentioned was killed in Jerusalem in 69 C.E.; so that Matthew makes Jesus refer to an event that occurred forty years after his death. This is the same Zecharias Baruchus who, according to Josephus, was slain in the temple a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem" (p. 195). Indeed, it is the skeptic, not Jesus, Matthew, or any other inspired writer, who is proven to be contradictory.

#8—Additional Material is Not Necessarily Contradictory

One of the most commonly neglected rules of interpretation that Bible critics overlook when attacking Scripture is that extra information is not necessarily contradictory information. When one Bible writer offers more details than another on a particular subject, it is inappropriate to assume that one of the writers is mistaken. When a journalist in the 21st century writes about a man on the side of the road who has just escaped death following a particular catastrophe, while another journalist writes how this same man **and** his wife (standing next to him) are suffering survivors of the devastating disaster, it does not mean that the first journalist was denying the wife's existence. For his own reasons, unknown to his readers, he chose to focus on only one of the survivors.

Suppose you heard a collegiate athlete say that he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **left knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. But then, later, you hear him say that he

tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **right knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. Are these statements contradictory? Should you assume the man is lying? Not at all. Why? Because it may very well be that the gentleman injured his left knee **and** his right knee in the same year. (Many people have.) The addition or exclusion of information does not mean two different testimonies are contradictory; they may very well be **supplementary**. Countless times throughout Scripture, and especially within the gospel accounts, extra information is given that critics cannot justifiably prove to be contradictory.

John 19:38-40

Consider how Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about how a man named **Joseph** took the body of Jesus following His crucifixion, "wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock" (Luke 23:53; cf. Matthew 27:59-60; Mark 15:46). The apostle John, however, noted that Joseph actually had help in burying Jesus. He wrote: "Joseph of Arimathea...took the body of Jesus. And **Nicodemus**, who at first came to Jesus by night, **also came**, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then **they** took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury" (19:38-40, emp. added). Are the accounts of Jesus' burial contradictory? Skeptics could never prove that such is the case. This incident simply is an example of extra information being given by one of the Bible writers. Had Matthew, Mark, and Luke stated that Joseph was the **only** person involved in Jesus' burial, then skeptics may have a valid point to argue. But as it stands, John simply supplemented the others' accounts, adding **additional facts** to the story.

John 18:40

When Mark and Luke recorded how the Jews petitioned Pilate for the release of Barabbas, they both called him a

murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18-19; Acts 3:14). Yet when John wrote about Barabbas, he omitted all discussion about his homicidal past and simply indicated that “Barabbas was a robber” (John 18:40). Is it possible that Barabbas was both a murderer **and** a thief? Of course. How many prisons around the world today house individuals who have committed both murder and burglary?

John 20:1

Some of the most criticized portions of Scripture are those that record testimony of the resurrection of Christ. According to Dan Barker, “The resurrection of Jesus is one of the few stories that is told repeatedly in the bible.... When we compare the accounts, we see that they don’t agree.... The story of the resurrection of Jesus...is hopelessly irreconcilable” (2008, pp.281,116). How are the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection “hopelessly irreconcilable?” One reason for this false allegation is because Barker and other critics refuse to recognize the fact that additional information is not necessarily contradictory. Was it essential for the apostle John to mention every woman who came to the tomb of Jesus on the morning of His resurrection, or was he at liberty to mention as few as he wanted (John 20:1; cf. Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1)? If Mary Magdalene was at the tomb on that Sunday morning, and John recorded that she was there, without ever denying that others (mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke) also were there, could his record of the events be truthful? Of course. Differences exist among the gospel writers’ accounts, but no one can prove that they are discrepant. Just as a person might say, “I went to the park with Bill, Bob, and Bubba,” he might also truthfully say, “I went to the park with Bill and Betty.” These statements are not contradictory. One merely supplements the other. A person may only mention Bill and Betty in one setting (e.g., at worship where the church knows the married

couple), while at another setting (e.g., at the office where only the men are known), he may truthfully just mention the men.

The Bible writers may not have worded things exactly the way some may think they should have, but such personal (or cultural) preferences do not invalidate their writings. Throughout the gospel accounts, statements are supplemented. Extra evidence frequently is given. And, the truth is, such supplementation should be expected from inspired, **independent** writers who did not have to participate in collusion in order to convey accurately the Good News of Jesus Christ. When one recognizes that supplementation cannot inherently be equated with a contradiction, many of the so-called “Bible contradictions” are easily (and logically!) explained away.

CONCLUSION

SOMETIMES statements differ because they are contradictory. The fact is, nothing can both be and not be for the same person, place, or thing, at the same time, and in the same sense. Likewise, differences do not necessarily mean that various accounts are discrepant. In fact, it is irresponsible and unreasonable to interpret legitimately explained differences as contradictions.

People generally understand that differences can abound in various accounts without a person needing to resort to charges of discrepancies. However, when it comes to the Bible, many people leave behind reason and fair-mindedness. To them, different accounts **must** be “contradictory.” Different wordings by different writers **must** mean someone was “wrong.” Though unproven and unprovable assertions in nearly every other area of life are quickly exposed as baseless allegations, when it comes to the Bible, differences are often thought to equal discrepancies.

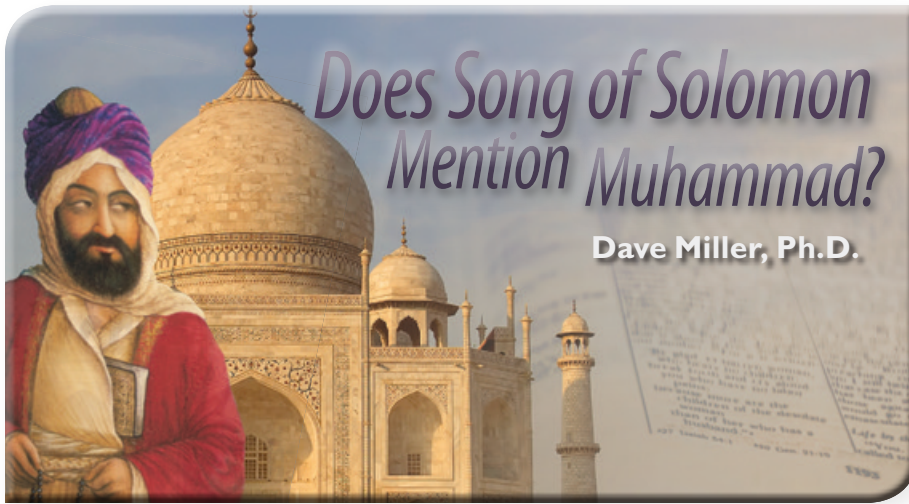
In reality, the different but truthful wordings in Scripture are exactly what a person should expect to find in a book

composed of 66 smaller books written by approximately 40 different writers, who wrote to different people, at different times, and in different places with different purposes. Furthermore, the differences in Scripture are parallel to the justifiable differences we expect from each other’s accounts in modern times.

The fact is, if the apostles and prophets wrote independently of each other, differences should be expected. However, the differences are not demonstrated discrepancies. They are only “contradictions” in the minds of those who reject the Law of Contradiction and the other fundamental principles discussed in this article.

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ISLAMIC apologists have attempted to bolster the credibility of their beliefs by claiming that the Bible, itself, makes reference to the coming of the prophet Muhammad. Ironically, this claim comes even in the face of the prevailing Islamic contention that the Bible has been corrupted, and thus cannot be relied upon as an accurate record of God's Word. Nevertheless, Muslim polemicist Zakir Naik claims that Muhammad is mentioned by name in the Hebrew text of Song of Solomon 5:16. The reader is urged to weigh this claim in light of the exegetical evidence surrounding the passage.

In English, the verse reads: "His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is **altogether lovely**. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" (NKJV). A phonetic transliteration of the underlying Hebrew text reads: *Kheeco mahm-tah-keem vuh-coollo **ma-kha-madeem** zeh dodee veh-tseh ray-ee beh-note yerushalayim*. Muslims claim that the bolded word, though translated "altogether lovely," is the name of Muhammad (Naik, n.d.). Consider six linguistic evidences that dispute Naik's claim:

1. The second syllable (*kha*) utilizes the Hebrew letter *beth* which has a hard initial sound like the "ch" in the Scottish word "loch." It is to be distinguished from the

Hebrew letter *he* which is the same as the English letter "h." If Muhammad was being referred to, the simple "h" would have been more linguistically appropriate.

2. Muslims claim that the *eem* (or *im*) in *ma-kha-madeem* in the Hebrew language was "added for respect" (Naik). This claim is untrue and unsubstantiated. The letters constitute the standard form for changing a singular to a plural—like adding "s" or "es" in English (cf. Weingreen, 1959, pp. 35ff.). As the eminent Emil Rödiger (who was professor for oriental languages at the University of Halle and the student of the well-known German Orientalist, H.F.W. Gesenius) noted in his editorial comment in the prestigious *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*: "The use of the plural as a form of respectful address is quite foreign to Hebrew" (Gesenius, 1898, p. 418).

3. The meaning of the Hebrew *ma-kha-madeem* is different from the meaning of the word "Muhammad" in Arabic. According to Sheikh Abd al-Aziz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, the word "Muhammad" is derived from the Arabic root word *hamd* meaning "praise." It is the emphatic passive participle of that root and can be trans-

lated as "the Oft-Praised One" (n.d.). However, the Hebrew term (*makh-mahd*) in the passage under consideration has a **completely different meaning**. It refers to "grace, beauty" (Gesenius, 1847, p. 464), "a desirable thing, delightfulness" (Brown, et al., 1906, pp. 326-327), "a pleasant thing" (Payne, 1980, 1:295), or "precious" (Holladay, 1988, p. 190). English translations render the term "altogether lovely" (NKJV, NIV), "wholly desirable" (NASB), and "altogether desirable" (ESV, RSV). No reputable English translation would render the underlying Hebrew as "praised one," let alone as "Muhammad." All Muslims have done is happen upon a Hebrew word that phonetically sounds somewhat like "Muhammad" and have erroneously concluded the word must be referring to him. Such handling of linguistic data is irresponsible—if not deceptive.

4. Further, the claim that Muhammad is intended in the verse completely disregards the context and message of the book of Song of Solomon. The book consists of a dialogue between Solomon, his Shulamite bride-to-be, and the "daughters of Jerusalem," with perhaps even God interjecting His comment (5:1b), as well as the Shulamite's brothers (8:8-9). The term used in 5:16 that Muslims claim refers to Muhammad is also used in 2:3 to refer to the Shulamite's beloved—"Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with **great delight**." "Great delight" is the Hebrew word also used in 5:16; in both cases the words of the Shulamite refer to her beloved—not Muhammad.

5. Forms of the same Hebrew word are used elsewhere in the Old Testament, yet Muslims do not claim that those passages refer to Muhammad. Rightly so, since those verses cannot be forced to fit the notion that Muhammad is under consideration. For example, Isaiah 64:11 mourns the destruction of Jerusalem: "Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste." "Pleasant things" is a form of the same word in Song of Solomon 5:16. Would the Muslim contend that Muhammad was "laid waste" in Jerusalem? Additional occurrences of the same word—which dispel the misuse of the term by Muslims—are seen in 1 Kings 20:6; 2 Chronicles 36:19; Lamentations 1:10,11; Ezekiel 24:16,21,25; Hosea 9:9,16; Joel 3:5; et al. (Wigram, 1890, p. 687).
6. Even if the Hebrew word "lovely/desirable" in Song of Solomon were the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic word "praised one" (which it is not), it still would not follow that Muhammad is being referred to in the Bible. Instead, it would simply be an indication that the underlying word stands on its own as a term used for other applications. For example, the Hebrew word for "bitter" is *mah-rah*. It is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to the concept of bitter. Yet, due to her unpleasant circumstances in life, Naomi (whose name means "pleasant") requested that her name be changed to "bitter" (*mah-rah*) to reflect her bitter predicament. It does not follow, however, that when the Hebrew word "bitter" appears in the Old Testament, it refers to Naomi. If parents today were to name their child John,

it would not follow that they intended to reflect an association with others in history who have worn the name John—nor would references to John in the Bible constitute prophecies pointing to their son. Muslims have the cart before the horse. Their claim is equivalent to parents naming their child "wonderful" or "special"—and then claiming that an ancient writer had their child in mind when the writer used the word "wonderful" or "special" in referring to another person contemporary to the writer.

The truth of the matter is that the Bible nowhere refers to Muhammad. All other biblical passages purported to do so may likewise be shown to be misinterpreted and misapplied (Miller, 2003). The Bible contains within itself evidence that all non-Christian religions are false and contrary to the will of the God of the Universe (for more, see Miller, 2005).

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NOTE FROM *The Editor*



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